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ABSTRACT

In response to recent state and national reports on the status of public education in the United States, the Council on Library and Network Development (COLAND) of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction issues this paper primarily to communicate the vital importance of school library media programs and the professionals who direct them in achieving educational excellence in elementary and secondary schools. School library media programs enable teachers and students to accomplish planned instructional objectives. As school districts address the educational needs of a changing world, the role and contributions of the library media specialist at the building, district, regional, and state levels must not be ignored. COLAND believes that the search for solutions to educational problems must include library media specialists as information specialists in this information era. The effective utilization of library media specialists in schools is a wise investment as schools continue to strive to improve the educational process. After a brief overview of school library media programs and some examples of library media program uses, the paper outlines COLAND's recommendations to Wisconsin legislators, school boards, K-12 school administrators, and parents and other concerned members of the community. (DMC)

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A Response to Reports Seeking School Excellence From a School Library Media Perspective

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The Wisconsin Council on Library and Network Development

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Preface

The Council on Library and Network Development is advisory to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Division for Library Services. Members of the council are:

Philip Martell, Chair, Public Library Trustee, Marinette
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Douglas Baker, Director, Northwest Library System, Ashland
Carol Diehl, Library Media Director, New London Public Schools
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The COLAND response was developed by a subcommittee: Carol Diehl, chair and Ruth Schmidt, member. Dianne McAfee Hopkins was the liaison from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Division for Library Services.

A RESPONSE TO REPORTS SEEKING SCHOOL EXCELLENCE FROM A SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

In recent months, educators, parents, and the general public have been made aware of the perceived status of public education in the United States through the release of several national and state reports. Each report has included recommendations for improving education and for achieving excellence in the future. As a governor-appointed council charged with the responsibility of providing recommendations to the State Superintendent of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Herbert J. Grover, and to one of the department's units, the Division for Library Services, the Council on Library and Network Development (COLAND) issues this position paper. The paper is designed primarily to communicate the vital importance of school library media programs and the professionals who direct them in achieving the level of excellence for which we all strive in elementary and secondary schools. The response is issued because recent reports suggesting improvements in education have failed to sufficiently address the role of elementary and secondary school library media programs in promoting excellence in education. While examples which are discussed relate specifically to the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, "A Nation at Risk," and to the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching report excerpt, "Secondary Education in America," the thrust of the recommendations which follow can and should be echoed in response to all studies of the need to achieve excellence in education.

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAMS

Just as a school's curriculum and the work of each teacher reflect the goals of the school district and the curriculum therein, the school library media program, through its professional staff, resources, and facilities, enables teachers and learners to accomplish planned instructional objectives. The library media professional accomplishes this overall objective by providing:

- materials, both on-site and from other libraries, of varying formats and levels of difficulty on a wide variety of subjects for students at all learning levels.
- leadership and instruction to teachers in the use of materials other than textbooks.
- instruction for students in the development and reinforcement of library media skills, including research skills, to promote independent learning and to build a foundation for lifelong learning.
- technical assistance in producing materials such as slides and transparencies.
- an atmosphere for students which encourages the development of positive self-concepts, self-exploration, and self-direction through such means as displays and interest center areas.
- inservice training sessions for teachers, such as current and effective applications of technology in appropriate curricular areas.

The impact of today's technological developments on the education of children is widely recognized and discussed. Technological development in the broadest sense has been incorporated in libraries since the first formal library. From the stylus to the ballpoint pen and all the way to computers, the advances of technology have been felt and used by the information profession. Significant tools of learning for this century can be found in libraries of all types, whether they be as basic as books or as complex as computers, television, or telecommunication networks.

Library media specialists are, by training and orientation, information specialists. Today, information is indeed the key to untold opportunities for all who access them well. Yet, the very professionals most capable of unlocking the doors and guiding the way to information in our schools are likely to be underutilized at best and overlooked at worst in attempts to derive the greatest educational benefit from the resources provided to our students. School districts can no longer disregard the impact of information when student need for knowledge is so great.

Educators know that all children learn as individuals, learn at various rates, and learn according to different styles and patterns. They know, too, that education is a continuous process. School library media centers are ideal learning laboratories, specially designed to take advantage of the knowledge of how children learn. When the instructional materials available in school library media centers are selected in cooperation with teachers and the curriculum in which it will be used, when the wealth of resources beyond the walls of the library media center are made accessible through lending agreements and computerized information data bases, when materials are designed and selected to meet instructional objectives appropriate for the range of students, and when students learn library media skills which teach them how to find answers rather than what the facts are--then learning and school library media center programs form a team in which the student is the winner.

A FEW EXAMPLES OF LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAM USES

"Nation at Risk" aptly indicates that the search for solutions to our educational problems must include a commitment to life-long learning. The Council on Library and Network Development supports this belief, for it undergirds a basic goal which all libraries seek to fulfill. It is not enough to "teach" reading or even to be certain that comprehension takes place, for example. Instruction must transmit a love of books and reading that will motivate continued reading long after the assigned lesson has been completed.

Textbooks have long been basic to education. In a world in which information is so vast and available in so many forms, a student must become adept at using many information sources, whether the resources are other books and reference materials or computer data bases, regardless of whether they are housed in the school library media center or public, university, or special libraries. All of these sources can serve educational objectives which focus on the variety of student aspirations, abilities, and preparation as described in "Nation at Risk."

The Carnegie Foundation report discusses, in part, the need for a variety of teaching styles by teachers. The Council, too, believes this to be important and recognizes the vital role that teacher preparation programs have to play in seeing that prospective teachers are trained in appropriate methods. Teachers need to have a thorough understanding of the role of educational media and technology in teaching and learning. They need to be experts in using the tools of their profession. School districts should take advantage of the special skills and knowledge of the library media specialist as they can provide inservice opportunities on an individual or group basis in the use of the full range of print, audiovisual, and

other current technology. Classroom teaching can indeed be enriched through the use of films, videocassettes, specimens, and other media. Wisconsin is proud of its statewide radio and television broadcast instruction for its K-12 schools. Cable television systems and districtwide distribution systems are also providing creative ways to improve the delivery of instruction.

The Carnegie Foundation report speaks, too, of the importance of providing excellence in education for the gifted student. The school library media center is an ideal source for independent learning and self-directed initiatives. In addition to on-site resources, cooperative agreements with other area libraries and, ultimately, libraries all over Wisconsin and beyond can broaden the resources available to all students, particularly those whose appetites for learning tax the local district's ability to provide appropriate resources. Special efforts, such as team teaching involving the library media specialist, can also broaden the range of experiences available to learners. Today's technology, such as two-way interactive video linking many school districts, can enable small groups of students, including the gifted, to meet together via television for regular classes or for a chance to explore topics of concern. Team efforts of this nature between school districts and/or cooperative educational service agencies (CESAs), which serve Wisconsin school districts at the regional level, can support additional instructional applications of technology beyond the school district.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As school districts address the educational needs of a changing world, as teaching methods change because of those needs, and as high expectations and goals are set for all students, the role and contributions of the library media specialist at the building, district, regional, and state levels must not be ignored.

The Council on Library and Network Development believes that the search for solutions to educational problems must include library media specialists as information specialists in this information era. Library media specialists have the knowledge and expertise which can provide the basis for better instruction and higher level thinking skills for each individual learner. Education is a wise investment for Wisconsin. The effective utilization of library media specialists in schools is a wise investment as schools continue to strive to improve the educational process.

With a spirit of pride in promoting excellence in schools, the Council on Library and Network Development makes the following recommendations:

To Wisconsin Legislators

Strengthen the state's commitment to elementary and secondary education as a state priority in Wisconsin.

Recognize access to information as an investment in a democracy.

Work together with the Department of Public Instruction and the Council on Library and Network Development in legislative initiatives relating to school library media programs.

Encourage school districts to have skilled leadership in school library media services through the requirement of district- and building-level school library media professionals at all grade levels.

To Wisconsin School Boards

Use technological resources for your own decision-making, including computerized searches of national educational research data bases.

Assure that policies are developed and implemented which will provide all students equal access to the complete range of instructional resources regardless of the age of the student or his/her location within the district.

Provide the leadership that is needed to assure quality school library media programs at all levels, including the authorization of employment of high quality professional library media staff in sufficient quantity and with sufficient training and experience.

Encourage the school district to participate in cooperative programs to promote sharing of resources and to increase course offerings for students as Wisconsin strives to reach the maximum potential in educational excellence.

To Wisconsin K-12 School Administrators

Be an example to staff and students alike of one who values information and seeks it through the school library media center and library media specialists.

Tap the expertise of those in your district who understand information access and its uses in instruction to promote excellence.

Educate yourself about the uses of information in an information society and use of technology in instruction.

Conduct surveys to determine levels of support and understanding of various school library media programs in your school district.

Contact the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and/or the cooperative educational service agency serving your school district for technical assistance.

Develop and/or revise districtwide long-range plans which recognize and promote the effective use of technology in education, and the use of school library media professionals at the district and building levels.

Visit recommended school library media centers in the state to see how others have made effective uses of instructional resources a focal point within the school district.

Secure the needed policy and budgetary support for effective school library media programs.

Develop staff and community understanding of the importance of informational access in elementary and secondary education for students and teachers.

Examine the desirability of flexible, open scheduling in school library media centers, such as evening, weekend, and summer hours.

Serve on public library boards to become more knowledgeable and to promote the sharing of resources between libraries of all types.

To Parents and Other Concerned Members of the Community

Volunteer to serve on study committees relating to school improvement or attend meetings of committees to gain a better understanding of educational issues.

Learn all you can about libraries and their role in promoting educational excellence.

Support school board members who recognize the value of information access and who want equity for all students at all levels.

Use area libraries yourself. Show students by example the value of life-long learning.

Promote high standards and expectations for literacy and communicate with school district decision-makers.

Support the efforts of school district staff in creating effective districtwide school library media programs.

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Educational leaders must look with vision to achieving excellence. In a world in which information and information access are paramount, the role of the school library media specialist must not be ignored.